

March 6, 2007

Testimony of Rich Robinson, Michigan Campaign Finance Network, to the House Ethics  
and Elections Committee on House Bill 4239

Chairman Corriveau and Distinguished Committee Members:

That you for taking up the issue of accountability for telephonic and Internet-based campaign communications. I speak in support of House Bill 4239.

Requiring telephonic and Internet-based campaign communications to include a disclaimer that identifies the individual or committee responsible for the communication addresses an area where the Michigan Campaign Finance Act has failed to keep pace with the new media of political campaigns. The people should be allowed to know who is sponsoring political campaign communications, no matter what the medium.

However, I think it is important to recognize the limitations of this bill. If campaign communications merely define political candidates but do not make reference to voting, the Michigan Campaign Finance Act makes no requirement that the sponsoring committee reveal its contributors or any information about the committee's finances *vis a vis* those ads. Let me illustrate this point with facts from the 2006 Michigan gubernatorial campaign.

The Michigan Democratic Party, the Michigan Republican Party, the Michigan Chamber of Commerce, the Republican Governors Association and Citizens for Traditional Values spent nearly \$20 million for television advertisements that defined candidates DeVos and Granholm. Assemble any focus group you like and show those ads and you will be told in unambiguous terms that those advertisements were political campaign ads. Yet, because those advertisements defined a candidate as a good leader or a bad leader, a job creator or a job destroyer, without making reference to voting, there is no public record in Michigan of who gave those committees the money they used to pay for those ads. You know the names on the exterior of some black boxes, but you can't know who put the money in the black boxes.

House Bill 4239 will require campaign ads on the new campaign media to have names on the exterior of black boxes. That won't necessarily help the people to know who put the money into the black boxes that are required to have names. So what do we really learn from those names?

This bill is a necessary first step. That first step must be followed by a requirement to disclose more about what have come to be known as "electioneering communications," or we're just putting names on the exterior of black boxes.